Mark Auerbach INTERVIEW DRAFT UPDATE
Greg Bennick – minterrors@gmail.com

GREG BENNICK: Hi everybody. My name is Greg Bennick with the Newman Numismatic Portal. I'm here with Mark Auerbach today, and we are going to be having a conversation about his career. We're going to have a conversation about his experiences with numismatics. Mark, I'm really happy to be here. This is awesome.

MARK AUERBACH: It's an honor and a pleasure to have you. I've been looking forward to this since Wayne Homren introduced us.

GREG BENNICK: I'm so glad.

MARK AUERBACH: Anything that I can give back to a hobby / business, which gave me exceptional moments in my life and introduced me to a plethora of amazing and talented human beings. Again, it's just an honor to be able to give back and resurrect some names of people who, unfortunately, a handful, are no longer with us.

GREG BENNICK: Well, why don't you tell me about your career trajectory. How did you get involved in numismatics to start. How did you get involved in numismatics, and how did things blossom from there?

MARK AUERBACH: Well, numismatics and philately. I'm 78 now, born in 1947. Had a cousin seven years older, and he dabbled in stamps and coins. And in those days, anything that you read which were comic books and match books, you saw them because everyone smoked, not me, little too young for that…there was always "Send 10 cents and you get stamps". Coins were available in those days in circulation. So, I was collecting stamps first, and I enjoyed that. Progressed from US to the world, and picked up a lot of stuff along the way. Regarding numismatics, I have a sister who's six and a half years younger than me, and my mother was saving pennies because we couldn't afford to put much else away in those days. You know, new baby was coming. So, I got a used Whitman penny folder, I think they were a quarter or 35 cents in those days. And I went through the pennies, and I filled up Book 2, pretty much, except for a few which I finally bought. Then I went to Book 1, and of course, there are coins from there…eventually I got them…but I had to pay a premium for them. I just liked it. And then, of course, what's affordable to a young person: nickels. I remember in 7th grade going on a class trip to Philadelphia, and I took all the nickels out of my nickel book so I had money to spend to go. You know, money was tight growing up, but over the years, there was a fascination…the differences.

I learned condition. I learned history from stamps and coins. You know, by the time I was ten, eleven, twelve years old, I knew all the countries in the world, the capitals, the locations, etc. And so many that disappeared after World War One are now back after the fall the Russian Empire. You know, it was very interesting. Boznia and Herzegovina, nobody knew who they were but I did. They're back. Montenegro, Serbia. It's amazing. But numismatics was just fascinating because a coin tells a story, and occasionally you find interesting things in change and circulation.

I don't have it here. It's in an off-site storage facility, but I have a nickel sized coin. It's silver, and it was from the Burgermeister, the mayor of a town in Germany. My father said, "Look, I got this as a nickel," and my dad, may he rest in peace, he worked nights in New York, driving a truck, delivering cake. Starting at about 10 years of age after we moved to Passaic, we moved in '56 so let's say I was ten – around 1957 I'd go to work with him Friday nights so I could spend time with him because he slept during the week. He worked there at night during the week. So, I didn't get paid obviously, I was with my father. That was priceless. I got to keep the coins that I needed for my collection. I remember

finding a 21-D dime, which was a great coin then, it's even more so today, and some other good stuff. And then on Saturday mornings, when all the drivers in those days would do collections – today you know, money don't circulate - real cash or change or anything. All the drivers before they checked in in the morning, when they knew I was coming, they'd all take all their change out and everything they were turning in and lining up, and I'd go through everybody's coinage. I mean, I had a system going there and customers saving stuff for me. It was wonderful. It was wonderful. And then some people had some old coins or tokens and all that other stuff. It was fascinating. It was history.

Who owned this coin before me, who had it? What a propitious moment, as we sit here today on the 12th as they struck the last Lincoln cent, and they made it in gold. It has an Omega on it. I'm wondering how many other letters from the Greek alphabet they used. Stacks Bowers is going to sell that. They're going to bring millions of dollars.

Years ago, I was facetious when people said, “What's with stamps and coins?” I said, “Well, stamps are something you put on an envelope to send away money to buy coins, or coins are something you spend to buy stamps.” And it hasn't changed. I collected currency. Living in Passaic I did collect Passaic national bank notes. I had the best collection. I went as far as you can go, except for some specimens which were unavailable or in museums. I sold that and I put that into other collectibles. You know, I'm still a collector.

GREG BENNICK: This is great. So how did you go from being a collector and identifying as a collector, to be involved in the coin business and the coin industry.

MARK AUERBACH: Well, let's see. In 1972 there were some people from the numismatic arena that were in the area. And I was going to coin shows since 1958. Early on, I went. I met some people in those days. The interesting thing was that many of the old-time collectors, if you will. In those days, they had infinitely more patience for young kids. They wanted to bring you into the hobby, and they gave you stuff, etc. I was the beneficiary of that. I still have one friend - he's in his middle to late 80s, who I met at the first Passaic County Numismatic Society meeting, which was back in the ‘50s. I was 10. I went to the coin shows. I still have a Confederate $5 bill with a bit of a tear in it that I paid a quarter for it at the first coin show I went to. I said to my friend's father, my best friend's father, “We're going to a coin show.” I didn't have any money on me, so I asked my friend's father, and he says, “Sure, here's $1” and I bought that for a quarter. I still have the Confederate five. I used to collect Confederate $2 bills because it was the only North American currency with a Jewish person on it, Judah P Benjamin.

I went as far as you can. I had a complete set by type and date, and there was one error in there, and then I sold that to someone who wanted it. He paid me a good price. And, I photocopied everything and sold the collection. Today, you can make a digital copy and it looks like it's the real thing. It's amazing, you know. So, it was just something that snowballed. And then I did work in a department store’s - assistant in the coin department, and realized I liked it. Then in Coin World, was an ad for Paramount Coin in Ohio. And at that point that I had a relative that just moved to Ohio, got married, lives in Columbus, and so I, I sent a resume. I got called in for an interview, and to my betterment and their whatever, Paramount hired me. It was Paramount International Coin Corp at the time, and I was hired by a person who became a dear friend, David W. Akers, may he rest in peace, who was the preeminent gold expert on US gold in the world and a lot of other stuff. People don't realize he was a mathematical genius. He was a captain in the military during the Vietnam years, and he may have been a Notre Dame grad…but he was a genius in marketing and everything. All their early achievements were because of him. Now, the company was founded by a Abe Kosoff, Mike DiSalle, the former governor of

Ohio, and there was someone else. I'm forgetting the name. You have to forgive me. It goes with the age. But he knew how to market things.

When they bought different collections, and they bought the pattern collection…I'm one of the few people…that was when I was leaving there in September of '73. I was there nine months and David said, "Mark, come into my office. There's something I want to see before you leave." And there's the pattern collection laying on his desk. I picked everyone up and squeezed them to left my fingerprints on the edge. And of course, the favorite one was what became the cover of his book. Judd 1776, the $10 pattern. You can never forget that - it's 1776. I saw and I learned a lot.

I shared an office with John Queen, who was the vice president of the company. He was a preacher. Some days he loved me, and some days he wanted to kick me back to Brooklyn. (Laughter) And I'm being polite. Ray Moreno was there. Ray gave me my dog Max…to get even with me. But Ray and I always got along. We had a great relationship. His earlier career was with Dave Bowers and Jim Ruddy. That was Triple City Coins I think it was? It was the genesis of what became Bowers and Ruddy.

(Phone rings for a bit)

GREG BENNICK: We'll let it ring.

MARK AUERBACH: So, Ray Moreno was there. When I got there, there was a guy, Mark Thornton who was a whiz at US silver dollars and really a nice guy. Came from Indiana. I was the first person of an ethnic association that he got to know shall we say (laughter). We were good friends. We traveled together at shows. Ron Howard, who was a preeminent, world class numismatist. Jimmy Jelinski, another World Class numismatist.

GREG BENNICK: All at Paramount at the time?

MARK AUERBACH: They were all people at Paramount. Mulvaney was there. Max was there. You know, the President, he'd go out and buy stuff and, "Hey, it's your money. It's your company. Do what you want." But, you know, they find a way. But I learned an awful lot of things, an awful lot of things.

One of my fun experiences - you have to understand, and I'll put it on tape because it's a true story, and I don't take it negatively. But it's a part of the country, Englewood, Ohio, is a Southwest suburb of Dayton. I personally keep kosher and the last kosher butcher in Dayton closed in December, and I moved there in January. They knew I was coming. So, I either went to Cincinnati or Columbus for my meat, which was fine. I liked Cincinnati. Mulvaney would go with me and introduce me to stuff. And I had my cousin in Columbus, so that was good.

But for the first six months that I was at Paramount, I was the - I don't like to use the word as an adjective - but I was the company and city Jew. But they treated me really well. There were people that asked questions that were typical questions of people. And I learned something, a very important lesson, coming from the East. Of course, today, antisemitism is a major problem in the whole world now. Not just the United States - and I apologize for weaving this in - but I found out these people were not antisemitic by any stretch of the imagination. They were…lack of knowledge….I don't want to say ignorant….

GREG BENNICK: Curious.

MARK AUERBACH: No knowledge. I mean, I can waste the whole time here just telling you funny responses to things, so I'm not going to do that. But it was a learning experience at many levels. And of course, the Kagins were in business. Don Kagin is still in business. And his father, Art and his uncle were in business. And Julian Liedman. Juli was in business. Sol Kaplan, so I said, “Hey, you know, we can put a minyan together at a show now!” (laughter) I mean, it was wonderful.

We, Paramount, ran auctions very successfully. And I remember one time going out and Dave Akers, who used to break my socks because I kept kosher and he knew what it was (if you look in Leviticus, all the description is there of what's kosher.)

We’d go out, and I remember one time we finished the show and the auction, and it's 11 o'clock, and this was for the greater New York show. I think in May of ‘73 and so we're going out to the restaurant in the hotel to eat. And, you know, whatever it is Paramount's paying for it. I mean, you know, we earned it. Had a good show. And waiter comes over and I ordered something, a piece of meat. Then Dave calls the waiter over. He says, “Whatever he ordered, make sure it chews its cud first.” (laughter)

I mean, it was good natured humor, and I appreciated it. I learned a lot, to a person. There was not one person in the numismatic venue that I met that I did not get along with. I was true and loyal to Paramount. I brought in some very good deals because I paid attention and listened. I knew what I was looking at. I was mostly self-taught before I got to Paramount, but I realized I had an opportunity to learn. I'm very proud that I'm the one that…they had a customer that had stamps, and they were a coin company, Paramount International Coin Corporation. They were very big in NCLT, non circulating legal tender, but someone had stamps, and I started their stamp department for them. Then, of course, it expanded.

But the first time they did stamps, somebody had a roll of either six or eight cent perforated coil stamps, regular first-class postage, but the perforations in the middle of stamp. So, I said to Mulvaney, “What do you think?” And Tom says, “Sure, we can do this.” So, we took it, we wrote the copy. I made some suggestions. Tom's a great copywriter. There's no better photographer. He's a gifted writer, and he can type. I hate him for that…he can actually touch type. And we sold out. We had to go out and buy more. I had to fly back from Ohio, back here to the Greg Manning Company to buy more errors, to fulfill orders. Dave couldn't believe it. And I learned it's not only having the right product, it's how you market it. When some years later, I did per diem cataloging for the Numismatic Antiquarian Service Corporation of America called NASCA, and they handled a lot of stuff. I would have some time as I was sitting there. I would nonchalantly and with a little bit of tongue in cheek…and I'm a very talented writer….I would write a description of something that was mundane and simple, but when I was done, people had to buy it. They didn't bother to look at the lot number in the picture and see if it was something they had. When I was finished, describing a common Lincoln cent, they had to have it.

GREG BENNICK: And that’s the marketing, the description of it in the catalog…

MARK AUERBACH: I currently get all the announcements for all the Heritage and the Stacks Bowers auctions and all the catalogs from all these people, and I see what's going on there. It's amazing. And when certain ultra-rare or unique coins hit certain record prices, I print out the page and tuck it in the Walter Breen books. Now I got to know Walter very well.

GREG BENNICK: Tell me more.

MARK AUERBACH: Walter was an amazing man. Over the years there's no other word to use. He was prostituted by everybody for his knowledge. If they made books, he got nothing on them. When his encyclopedia came out in the 80s, ironically, Doubleday was printing it, and they had signed an editor to it, a copy editor. I forget the gentleman's name, but he says, “Do you know Walter Breen?” I said, “I know Walter very well. He's a good friend.” He said, “Well, once I called Walter up. Walter said, ‘You have any corrections or anything that you need done if you can't reach me, Mark can handle it for me.’”

So. when the book debuted, I had them drop shipped to my house. Somebody else was involved, who shall remain nameless, who talked big but produced nothing. And it was in New Jersey. It was a Garden State Numismatic Association show, and the book debuted there. The copy that I got before it was released, which Walter autographed and wrote in, brought unconscionable money at the auction. They insisted it go in. But I did get him to autograph two others, one to my son and one to my daughter, and those are the two that I have. Everything that he authored, that I owned, he autographed, and when I sold it in auction, as I referenced earlier, I photocopied all those pages, so I have copies of what he wrote to me. It's amazing. So, Walter was a good friend. He slept on that…

GREG BENNICK: On that couch?

MARK AUERBACH: Yes, he slept on that couch? Yes. For those who can't see it because the camera is not on it, I have a sofa bed in my apartment. David Akers, may rest in peace, slept on it. Walter Breen, may he rest in peace, slept on it. P, Scott Rubin, Michael Hodder, Frank Katen. G, Gordon Frost and a handful of other luminary people in the numismatic world at the time.

GREG BENNICK: My next question was, tell me about some people you remember - like those numismatists from the 70s, from the early 80s and whatnot?

MARK AUERBACH: Well, there's one person who is preeminent in the industry, and I was there at the beginning fortuitously. When I left Paramount, I got hired by Pine Tree. Stanley Applebaum, ran the company.

GREG BENNICK: Oh! Okay.

MARK AUERBACH: He hired me because I worked at Paramount, and he thought I was this numismatic genius, but he wanted to know everything they were doing. Okay. So, for thirty days, I lived by an aunt in Brooklyn, and I commuted to Queens. I really saw Stanley for what he was. Walter was there at the time. That's how we really got closer. And I realized that Walter came out with his book on proof coins, I think, at the time? And I said, “How much in royalties should you get through this?” He goes, “Royalties? You see any royalty around here? You see kings and queens?” I didn't go any further on that. I said, “Well, I'm sorry to hear that.”

Anyway, when I was there, they had an auction arm, and Herb Melnick was the Auction Manager. And in comes this young guy with his father. A kid, 15 years old. He's wearing a blue three-piece corduroy suit. It's Kevin Lipton.

GREG BENNICK: Really.

MARK AUERBACH: I had met him at some local shows. I knew of him, and we had met, but I knew he was the real thing. I. He was just a numismatic genius. There's no other way to describe it. When he came in and Herb is looking, and a kid's fifteen and he's asking for credit in the auction. The father's with him. Arthur may rest in peace. Arthur liked me, and I got along with him. He was a take it or leave it person. Kevin always wanted to leave him, but he needed him. He didn't drive yet, and he did live with his with his parents for a while growing up.

So, I convinced Herb. "This kid's the real thing. Give him the credit." And of course, he thanked me for it later on. And then Kevin went on to become Kevin Lipton, you know, KRLC rare coins. I spoke to him. I think last time was, a couple of years ago. He bought a penny, a pattern, I think a Birch cent for two point something million, whatever it was. I called him up to congratulate him. I called the company. I hadn't spoken to him in a long time or seen him. I don't go to shows. And the lady said, "Well, he's busy now." I said, "Just tell Kevin that Mark Auerbach is on the phone, please." Next thing you know, he picks up. (laughter)

When he opened up his business and he'd be on the road… I had a rare coin and stamp store in Fort Lee, New Jersey for eight years, '76 through '84. If Arthur had anything he couldn't handle, and didn't know what it was, because they had an office in Polygon Plaza in Fort Lee, Arthur would call me and I'd go over there and I took care of it. They trusted me implicitly. I have the utmost respect for Kevin. His numismatic genius is a second to the none. He was another Walter Breen, but totally different. But Kevin can look at a coin, knew what to pay for it and what he could get for it and where he could get that for it.

You know, back to Paramount… a little about other people. In those days, people would come to Paramount to look at lots for the coin auctions before. And they'd fly in because you had a major airport. It was Dayton International Airport, but it had another name on it. Anyway, and it was an easy airport to fly in and out of. But the people who paraded through was everybody in numismatics. The Goldbergs came through from Superior in those days. Steve Ivy. And, oh, who was the guy that used to go around with Steve Ivy, also from Texas. They traveled together to keep the overhead down and share expenses. Today, they're all multi-millionaires.

People came in, you know, and I'd see him there, and I recognized them. I knew him from the shows at this point. "Hi, how you doing, Mark? Hi how's this, that, whatever," you know, sometimes go out with them for dinner or something, because they were staying over. They weren't flying in and out the same day or something. But I found that to be a good fraternity. I found it friendly, *very* competitive. You know, people wanted the deal. And you know, I never divulged anything that I saw, or that I heard at Paramount. I gave my word. That's part of working. You know, its not that I signed a nondisclosure thing, but you have allegiance to the people who pay your salary. And I enjoyed it, all the people. If I took out a 1973 or '74 Numismatist and went through it, I can run through all the people and tell you stories about everybody in there,

Mr. Mulvaney and I kept up over the years. I know I speak to him at least once every four years, because his birthday is February 29. He was born on that date, 1948, a leap year. He's in Lexington, Kentucky now. I caught up with Ray Morena over the years. He and Pat were very good to me, and he's gone now, may he rest in peace. Some of these people are gone now…

But you know, numismatics, this is an interesting story. I saw a name online in Coin World, which I read online. That's how I afford them in retirement. John Albanese.

Now, John Albanese founded NGC, and he did that over in Parsippany, New Jersey. So, when he founded that, I wrote him a letter looking for a job, explaining, “I'm not looking to be a grader or anything,” I said, “But if people are sending coins to you, the greatest value is in recording all the coins that come in. Because you're taking pictures of them, you're taking the specific gravity. And this is something that Michael Hodder instilled in me. There's more value there than in grading. So, he called me and said, “Mark, I'll keep it on file.” Didn't come to pass. And then he sells the company to Mark Salzberg. I brushed it up, and went from 25 to 50 cent words with a little bit more to add. I sent it to Salzberg, and I got hired.

GREG BENNICK: What year was this?

MARK AUERBACH: That's a good question. Yeah, whatever. So what I did was and I started slowly bringing my library over there, because what I was doing was writing something new and different, which I'll show you when we're done on all the different coin series. When I would get a particular series, I would pick up the phone and call every expert in the country on it, which was a who's who of American numismatics at the time.

GREG BENNICK: Do you remember who you were calling at the time?

MARK AUERBACH: Well, Ken Bressett, Akers, Dave Bowers, you name it. Everyone in the industry who had expertise in a given series. If I was doing something on territorial gold, it would be John Ford and Don Kagin. I mean, there was no limit to who I could call.

GREG BENNICK: Amazing.

MARK AUERBACH: I really had that entree. I was highly respected. There was the Taylor Collection of colonial coins that Bowers handled. It was held in New York, and Ford in the same picture, which is unique unto itself. There was a photograph taken. I'm in that photo, and I have a copy of it. And then there was the famous - when they had the Louisville, so the Cincinnati ANA and I had suggested it. It was my idea. Armand Champa, may rest in peace, was alive, the patron saint of numismatic literature and one of the nicest people. He actually came from Fitchburg Mass. Armand Champa. I found covers over the years, and I gave them to him, he said, “Mark, it's the greatest gift anyone gave me.” He was very good to me. I miss my friend dearly.

And so, we were having the ANA in Cincinnati. I said, “You know what? Armand, why don't you ask people - $100 a head - we rent the boat bus and we all go down to Louisville by you.” That's great. He took care of everything, fed everyone…the whole nine yards. The invasion of Louisville. And of course, there's a classic photo of it. Martin Gergerke, may he rest in peace, and I are front and center. I learned early in life about photographs, and the public will love this: when you're in a photo and you're not going to be dead center, stand next to the fattest person you can find, so you look thin and stand next to the ugliest person, so you'll look better. And if you can, you get in the middle.

In the invasion of Louisville. Martin Gergerke, may rest in peace, and Marcus Auerbach are dead center. And it was my idea to do that. And somebody sold something on eBay once, and you looked at the notes, and I made copies of them off of, you know, right click ‘Grand Theft Image’, and it supports what I said. I mean, I know what I did. I'm the kind of guy that thinks outside the box, and I'm usually successful. I dream and make the dream come true.

Now, I guess it's an appropriate moment at this point… it was the ANA in Pittsburgh. I don't know if it was '88 or '89 I forget what it was. Someplace in the late '80s. And before that, I agreed to deliver a paper on the Clapp coins, the Clapp large cents, which were ensconced in the ANS. And I would go over there all the time and look at them, and then I was going over more and more. And you know, they were all pedigreed coins. The little bit of history. and this is from memory, so forgive me if I mistake, or people are going to see this, and say "He made a mistake!" I make a lot of mistakes. I've got two ex-wives. I make a lot of mistakes.

I'm looking at everything. And then we had the ANA at Carnegie Mellon. Now Carnegie Mellon was endowed by George Clapp. For those who don't know who George Clapp was, he was one of the preeminent large cent collectors and other series. But he founded a "little" company called Alcoa Aluminum. Minor technicality.

Before World War II, or he promised to donate his mainline collection to the American Numismatic Society in New York. But World War Two broke out, and so the coins were ensconced in some kind of mountain vault for a bunch of years. They arrived at the ANS in 1946-47 someplace in there. Without mentioning names, they weren't there long enough to meet room temperature and they were switched. How did I know this? I didn't at the time, when I was working on the paper I delivered, but when we were at Carnegie Mellon, we met there to look at the coins. They had an original Numismatist, the first bound six books, which is the first year bound. They also had something which was more interesting as far as I was concerned. I found it on the shelf, and no one else looked at it, an original copy of Common Sense by Thomas Paine, who was in Passaic two hundred and forty-nine years ago tomorrow, when Washington retreated through here from Fort Lee, just thought I'd throw that out there. Ken Burns let that one slip through the cracks.

GREG BENNICK: Well, you're also a historian for the city of Passaic.

MARK AUERBACH: Yes. I'm not defined by my numismatic, Jewish or American history. I'm good at what I do, but I've spent 65-70 years accumulating that knowledge with some of the best people and the best primary sources.

So, when I looked at the coins, at the Carnegie Mellon Institute, something struck me as odd. I go, "Wow, these are high grade." But if these were his doubles, you know, which could have been a half a grade on the Sheldon scale below what was there? Why are a lot of these nicer than the specimens that I saw? There's only one conclusion. And then I had a discussion with someone no longer with us, and I won't mention him, who confirmed that that was the suspicion, and I just locked it in.

I shared the information with Eric, because he's one of the people that I totally trusted about all of this. Because in those days, he was a collector more of information. He'd collect coins. He had an amazing collection. We know that. Across the board of lots of different things. John Ford was Eric Newman on steroids. I got to see John's stuff also. But Hodder got to collect it because they had that close relationship. As a matter of fact, when they found the SS Central America wreck, I was one of the first people that John Ford called to see if I'd be available to help in any size, shape or form? And I said yes, but then right away they got hit with lawsuits, and everything sat for a while till it got straightened out. So a handful of people who greased the skids made good money, but the information came out, and I do not have an 1857-S pocket piece, a double eagle, from the wreck, no matter what people want to say.

As you go along, you see and you hear, you pay attention. I pay attention to detail. I look at the minutia. I'm the guy that reads the fine print before I sign anything. And it's important that we do.

When I was with Paramount, somebody came to our table at a coin show, and they said they got a bunch of 1856 Flying Eagle cents. Most people they went to said, "Yeah, right." They came to me. It turns out it was the largest hoard, which eventually….I forget the company that got it, because even Paramount didn't want to….

It's the two guys. It's a blue covered catalog from '73 I can picture it. I would go through catalogs, and what you do is you try to get the early ones. The plates are good. Because you can plate match. And that answers a lot of questions. I will tell you that in the New Jersey colonial coinage, Novi Caesarea cents, the horse heads. I am proudly the man who found the first known photo of Dr. Edward Maris. Nobody had one. No one knew what he looked like. And I go, "Wait a second. He was a physician…"

GREG BENNICK: Tell us that story

MARK AUERBACH: "…He was a Quaker." So, he had to exist. There had to be a picture. And he graduated from Philadelphia School of Medicine, or some variation of that name in Philadelphia. So, one day in October 1989 I picked up the phone, and by the end of the day, I had all the answers I needed, and I found out where his picture was. I got in touch with his grandson, who passed away within six months. Robert Maris.

GREG BENNICK: He was quite elderly, right?

MARK AUERBACH: Yes, yeah, yes. Ironically, Robert Maris was a judge, but the thing with counsel is that when you get old, they keep your name on the letterhead. He would consult. But at the time, he was the oldest civil servant the US government. His office was in the federal building in Philadelphia, on the ninth floor. The irony is, my best friend was with the National Weather Service, and that's where they were headquartered. And I said, "Why didn't you tell me he was there?" He said, "You didn't ask. I didn't know who you're talking about!"

But whatever it was, I eventually met him. I went with some other people who shall remain nameless. We got actual medals from Maris. What's interesting? I think it's CM27 or CM24. I'm not sure – it's in the Julian book. It's the Maris family medal. Nobody ever put two and two together, but Dr Edward Maris lived in Philadelphia his whole life. He was on Pine Street. And in those days, you could take private gold and have a medal struck at the US Mint. They had a 200th anniversary, I think of the Maris family in America, 1683-1883. Whatever it was. There were silver specimens that brought next to nothing, until I made people aware of the fact that that was the Maris family. And now, of course, you know, the few that are out there bring multi-thousands of dollars, but I found something else. And I don't know if I've ever said this before, so we've got to have something that no one's heard. I may have discussed it, a piece, here and there. Dr Edward Maris, I am convinced - he bought the Crosby collection of coins - and if you read the introduction to Crosby and go into it a bit, and you read the copy of the auction catalog from 1886 of Maris' stuff, Dr Edward Maris was the man who, at one time, owned most, if not all, of the Confederate cents. You read it and it's as plain as the nose on your face.

I like research. I pay attention to minutia. I put two and two together, but all of this came with my late father and mother, may they rest in peace. They fostered an academic approach to life in me. My father

used to say, “With knowledge, you can acquire dollars and cents. Just because you have dollars and cents doesn't mean you can buy common sense.” And he was right. And so, I would revisit things that other people did and find new information. I've done it many, many, many times,

Staying on the topic of New Jersey colonial coinage. Maris was the first one to systematically really do something, and he did it with colonial New Jersey, and they still carry Maris numbers. I think they're into the late 80-something, or something like that. Anyway, I've lost my train of thought. It happens when you're old, those who are watching. If you're not old yet, you have something to look forward

GREG BENNICK: You went to visit judge Maris, who at the time, I believe, was 96 years old.

MARK AUERBACH: Yeah, yes, yeah. That got a lot of publicity. Yes, yes. I remember that well. And yeah, and the picture made the front page of Numismatic News and Coin World.

GREG BENNICK: No one had a picture of him yet.

MARK AUERBACH: No, nobody knew what he looked like until I brought the picture forward.

GREG BENNICK: And your correspondence with Judge Maris is in the Newman Portal. Its available in the Newman Portal. The letters you wrote back and forth.

MARK AUERBACH: Yeah, my correspondence. And there's more correspondence with other people. Bob Julian, John Ford, David Akers. I once applied some place for a job, and so I called on all these people for letters of reference. I didn't get the job I applied for, which I found very humorous in retrospect, when you consider the people were all *the* giants of American numismatics and all the different disciplines. And the test of knowledge and respect from some people.

One time, after a bunch of years, I picked up the phone and called Don Kagin, because I was something I wanted to tell him, and it was like we had just seen each other the day before. His father and his uncle were very gracious and kind to me. Julian Liedman could never say enough nice things about him. The late Sol Kaplan, who was in Cincinnati at the time, which was close to Paramount in those days. I mean, it was just an amazing time. You had real people who actually turned hobbies into a profession. That's what they did. B. Max Mehl. He was no numismatist of consequence, but he was able to market this stuff.

New Jersey numismatic history and colonial coins. The Nova Caesarea is the horse heads. There was a man named Frederick Augustus Canfield who collected them. Now, in the old days, there was great competition of the real super collectors. They were all good friends. They did everything together. But when they go to an auction, you know, they pointed guns at each other anyway. Canfield had the finest New Jersey colonial collection, and a lot of people, you know, they wanted it. But, you know, secretly, they're probably waiting. They all hope that the people that have what they want would suddenly pass away. You know, food poisoning, a heart attack. You know, they didn't have car accidents in those days, not too many people…basically trains.

So what Canfield did is he donated his collection to the New Jersey Historical Society. Yes, he donated it to them. That's where it sat for many years. When I found out what was there, later on, I went there and I was able to photograph a lot of it. I have that stuff someplace. I never got finished with it because the executive director suddenly left, and a guy who replaced him was a young kid who I don't think he

knew he was in Newark, New Jersey. I was able to get Michael Hodder and another person in because of my connections there. So, all of the specific information on all of the 109 coins, plus, we found out there was actually one of the plates of the what you call it, not the real ones, the electrotypes of the Maris collection, one of the three original plates. Maris owned it. But it's sitting there as we speak now, that collection, after I called them to ask them some questions now it's permanently on loan, or some other back-room maneuver.

It's at the American Numismatic Society, which is now down on Wall Street in the old sub Treasury Building, [Note: it is actually on Varick St, until its upcoming move to Toledo Ohio in approximately 2028] because when I called up the right after the collection was loaned indefinitely to the New Jersey Historical Society, some of the most important, coveted coins, one of them being a Maris plate coin, 35X or W or whatever or Y. One of those suddenly wound up being indefinitely loaned to the American Numismatic Society, which was a way of moving something legally across the river before you got your hands on it. Read between the lines, folks, whoever's listening to this.

And so they solved that problem, because for years I told them, and I guess they didn't want to hear the truth anymore that some of their coins were in New York, and they didn't even know about it. So, this is what it is. If people want something. There was some very preeminent after I brought my information on all of the Clapp stuff, eventually, a lot of the coins went back to where they belonged, to the ANS, and a lot of people who had bought them had to absorb the loss of the purchase of the coins. A lot of prominent names. I don't remember them now, but I recognized them at the time.

So, you know, numismatics is something that's very interesting. Every coin tells a story, quite often, uniquely, and you have to look at it if you want to still have fun. I own a couple of New Jersey colonials, I bought years ago just for the sake of having them. I've owned some very expensive ones. I've handled them. There's a couple out there. I actually made the book that they did, the last big magnum opus on New Jersey coins, and my name is in there, not as a contributor, but my name is listed on a pedigree of a very scarce coin where there's only three known. And this was the finest specimen, and I knew that at the time when I handled it for the owner.

But what's nice about it, you can buy unattributed coins. Could be New Jersey, Massachusetts, Vermont's, New York's, Fugio's, Constellatio Nova's, you know, any of the colonial stuff. And you can borrow or buy reprints of the books, and you can type them out and find some hellaciously scarce varieties. There's still a very fertile field of enjoying numismatics at many levels.

I remember the first time - I have a daughter is 46 now - and the first time we took her to the pediatrician, we went to her office, and the pediatrician knew I was in the rare coin and stamp business. She just came back from Russia, and she had a lot of large size US currency and asked what's it worth and if I would I look at it for her? So, I said, "Yeah, sure." I'm saying this is great. The first time I'm going there and I'm doing her a favor. So, we go there, and her father sent it to relatives in Russia, and then they buried it in the late '20s. So, it was all large size. And they dug it up, and she brought it all back here. So, you know, there was gold seals, you know, silver certificates. A lot of 10 to $20 large size gold seals. Condition was average circ, but there were a lot of 1899, the eagle silver certificates. And of course, there were some better signature combinations in there, and that's the key. Most dealers, they'll prorate them so much a note, but the better signature combinations are worth a hundred times more, easily. And so, I did all of this for the doctor, and she was thrilled.

Then, just as an add-on, me being me, my daughter was cutting teeth early. We went to the doctor, I didn't even get out of the waiting room, or have her half out of her snowsuit. Doctor says, “She's doing better. Take this.” I got a $25 bill. Never left. So, I said, “I don't understand.”

Well, the Doctor said, that's how I make my money. I said, “You know you're right.” Well, when I came there the first time with my daughter, I made a house call and did an appraisal. “I'll pay you your 25 and I'm sending you a bill for $300.” We were best friends after that.

GREG BENNICK: So, tell me, slightly shifting gears. Tell me about Omaha and Byron Reed.

MARK AUERBACH: Okay, I was aware of Byron Reed in the Omaha collection. David Akers had mentioned it a lot because there were a lot of coins in the Reed collection that David used in his gold books. I don't know who he sent there to take the pictures. So anyway, I get a call one day from - he's now deceased - Richard G Doty, Dr Doty, who was Head Curator at the Smithsonian before when he passed. Before that, he was the US Curator at the American Numismatic Society. And I knew him through scholarship and research. We had a great amount of respect for each other, and we became good friends.

He called me up and said, “How would you like to come to this opening?” And I go, “Okay.” I figured out I can manage to do it. And it was black tie. Okay, so I called up there, and I'll never forget the lady's name. Don't ask me why. Marilyn Jensen was the secretary at the Western Heritage Museum. And I said, “You have places to get tuxedos and stuff out there.” She goes, “Yeah.” I says, “Well I do own black shoes and black socks. These are my measurements.” She says, “You're good.” I says, “Well, my grandfather was a tailor, so I learned,” and of course, it fit when I got it. So, they had it waiting for me, and I sent a check to pay for it. I went to the reception, and it was awesome.

But I got there a few days earlier, so they let me in. And because Dick Doty said, “You have any questions, this is the guy you want to talk to.” So, I got to see the whole Reed collection as they were putting it in the Berg motion case. You know, here I am holding and, “Oh, that's nice. Oh, it's an ‘04 dollar… big deal. I've seen three already…” And then there's other stuff in there that nobody knew was in there. There was, I think, was it the 1829 proof, large planchet half eagle? That was one of the coins they sold unfortunately. I think that's what it was. But I saw stuff, and I took copious notes, which I still have, of everything. And that night on the phone, I called Akers and told him about everything. He goes, “Amazing. It's amazing. Mark. Thank you. I can't thank you enough.” And I was there, and I helped him set up the exhibit, and I had a great time there. I had driven. I took a manual typewriter with me, and in my hotel room, or motel room, whatever it was, I typed the press release for Numismatic News. I covered it for Numismatic News. I made five total trips to the Western Heritage Museum in Omaha, Nebraska. I was one of very few people who saw everything they had: recollected manuscripts of famous people. Probably the most important thing I held in my hand - he had a pile of Washington signed letters, sideways it was two inches tall. But the most important thing he had, and they call them “true” copies, because they didn't have copiers in those days - somebody would have to write a second one or a third one. It was a copy of the Louisiana Purchase, and I picked it up, and it's got all the ribbons and the wax seals hanging down. And there's Jefferson and Monroe and Madison and Bonaparte and all these people signed it. That was pretty cool. That was pretty cool.

And then in looking at the notebooks and stuff, I found all the notes that Walter Breen had made years ago when he was there in ’55. So, I updated Walter on my notes. But the Byron Reed collection - it pained me when they decided to sell off a sizable section of it to finance bigger and better quarters,

which made no sense. It's like selling your house so you have more room for the furniture, but now you have nothing to put over the furniture. You know, having five kids and selling one to feed the other four. It doesn't make sense, but I was asked to be involved in it, and I passed.

I was the first one that they called because I had the most knowledge on it. I had seen it. I saw everything. They let me stay downstairs. I still have my cotton gloves from when I was there. I saw everything. The average of all the coins - and he had ancients and from all periods - the average grade across the board of everything he owned, numismatically, anything that could be considered a coin, was probably VF/XF. And you're going way back. I mean, he had signatures in the autograph collection, on vellum. I mean, he had absolutely amazing stuff. If there was such a thing as a portable camera and a cell phone, I would have burned up mine taking pictures.

But the Byron Reed collection…I remember Paramount, in the gold pattern collection that they bought, there were six patterns that were in gold. There was a set in copper, silver and gold. Byron Reed had the copper and the silver. I'm the only one to see all three versions of that set, of those. I forget what the Judd numbers are. And then they had some guy from Bowers who redid the book, and then Dave redid it. You know, everybody's got to put their own numbering system on things. Whatever floats your boat.

GREG BENNICK: You've talked about knowledge again and again and again. Tell me about numismatic education overall, and the role that that's played for you?

MARK AUERBACH: Well, there my numismatic education came from reading every source I can get, ad nauseum, but it all came to life when you see the item. Okay, I've handled three or four of the Brashers physically in my hand. Five of the ’04 dollars, and a bunch of other things, plus things that are unique. You know, I appreciated what I was looking at and holding in my hands. This was history. This was something that, you know, the few people that may have handled it before, and you realize, “Hey, I'm holding something that so and so held.” That's what was so important for me. That's what I greatly appreciated. And then I realized from all these people that say, “Well, what would you recommend to further my knowledge on this subject?” And they would tell me, “John Ford always gave me names of things, read this, read this.”

He had acquired the Wayte Raymond collection, the safes, everything. I got to go out to John's place, I think it was in Franklin, central Long Island. Everything was just amazing, what these people had, and they had copious notes.

I live currently…we're in the city of Passaic, New Jersey right now, in case anyone wants to know where ground zero is for the purpose of this conversation. I bought a philatelic cover once that had to do with Spear winery in Passaic New Jersey. And I had to leave a bid because I was going to an ANA sale. This was in the late ‘80s. And the irony was that the cover was addressed to Dr George P. Hetrick, Birdsboro, Pennsylvania. For those of you who collect Civil War hard tokens, Guttag and Hetrick in the 20’s, were the first ones to do a catalog of the subject. So, I got this great philatelic numismatic thing that I stumbled upon because I knew who it was. I mentioned Frederick August - I forget his last name, the gentleman from New Jersey colonial coins. I found an envelope for $3 addressed to him and sold it for $500 to a New Jersey collector. And that's after he chewed me down from a higher number. Canfield was the man's name, Frederick Augustus Canfield.

Earlier on, some of his stuff was auctioned off in a New York auction. I forget what it was in the '60s. It's currently on eBay the catalog. Uh, so everything…there is an excitement. When you go, "Wow, I know what that is. Oh, I've heard of that. Oh, I know who, who collects this." '92 Disme I found a specimen that John J Ford Jr may he rest in peace, didn't know about. I called him up and I had a picture taken of it. I photocopied the reference in the catalog. I had the original catalog from way back when. I forget who the auction house was. Maybe it was a Hazeltine, I'm not sure.

I sent it. He was like, "What can I do for you?" I said, "Nothing. You know, think of me when you when you rewrite your will or something. I don't know John." But it's sharing. Numismatics is a fraternity at its best. It's a competitive business at its middle and then there are always those in every industry that want it all. You know, when I had a rare coin and stamp store for eight years in Fort Lee, New Jersey, I was one of the few that would share information to others, 'for me to know and you to find out.'

Very proudly, I would get inquiries from lots of dealers, foreign coin dealers in Europe, and in the United States for information, and I'd say, "Look, where'd you get the information? What book? Thank you. Call Harry Edelman company in Queens. They'll sell you the book." Because, to me, Harry sold more copies of Quarterman Publications than anybody else in the world, by a long shot.

It's a matter of sharing. The knowledge doesn't belong to me. I don't care what you own or how much you paid for it. If you think about the finality of time and the continuum of time, you're a temporary caretaker. The question is, how much are you willing to add your name to the pedigree for the time that you live? And that's kind of what it's all about.

GREG BENNICK: What did I miss? Because I was going to ask you about your career trajectory, which we covered, and other than that, we covered all the things that I wanted to know about. What did I miss? What's the part of the Mark story that I didn't think to ask you?

MARK AUERBACH: I'm still involved in numismatics. I still have customers from fifty years ago who want to get rid of stuff. I'm telling everyone now, with gold at $4000+ and silver at $50+, sell anything bulk you have, because you're in the profit zone. Take it. Don't lament. I had one customer who probably paid more for a safety deposit box than the amount of silver coins he's kept in there all these years because he didn't listen to me early on. Learn from it. You know, we see all these television ads now about gold. Yeah, the ads were great if you bought it $2000 and that doubled, it's great. If you bought at $4000, to me that ice is melting fast, because the precious metals market right now is being manipulated. I don't know who's doing it, but it is. When platinum and palladium are jockeying for which is more valuable, there's something wrong. There's something wrong. It's easier to steal a catalytic converter. But don't quote me on that. (laughter)

GREG BENNICK: Well, this has been fantastic, and I'm very appreciative of you and your time and your experience and you sharing these stories. It has been tremendous.

MARK AUERBACH: Well, I have to, actually, I have to thank you. But the person we both owe a major debt of gratitude to is Wayne Homren, from Pennsylvania. I've known Wayne through the Numismatic Bibliomania Society. He's basically kept it afloat and constantly breathes life into it. And the fact that I'm able to, in a fashion, honor a dear departed friend, Eric Newman and do something for Wayne who…you couldn't ask for a nicer person. He went out of his way to accommodate myself and my children, years ago, at a PAN convention. I was the speaker.

And it's funny when I think in the old days, and they'd ask you, “Would you come and speak at something? And it's a distance,” I say, “Will you pick up my expenses?” You didn't have to give me an honorarium. They took care of me, and I brought my kids, figuring I'd pay for them. And the people from PAN wouldn't have it. It was the first time my children ever saw me speak publicly. So that was pretty special.

But Wayne…with people like Wayne Homren on this planet and yourself doing the field work. The important information when you get to Tom Mulvaney someday, I think you told me he's on your list. He is certainly a man worth interviewing, and some of the other Paramount people that I referenced, if you can track down Mark Thornton, Ron Howard and Jimmy Jelinski. They were there in the early days. And these are people who were connected and very knowledgeable and would be good interviews. They're class people. They are class human beings.

And if you can ever get Kevin Lipton, they're the they're the stories…maybe half of them should stay buried. But Kevin Lipton, I saw him. I've known him since he's 15 years old, and he's just amazing. Is he the face of American numismatics in terms of knowledge and the ability to look at something, buy it and sell it…know what to pay, what to sell?

The other person I couldn't think of before, who used to travel with Steve Ivy: Mike Fillette. They used to come in together, keep the overhead down. Ivy's the CEO of Heritage that got offices on every block now. They're always hiring. I mean, they're getting to the point now where they're hiring people for their shoe division, one person to do left shoes, one to do right shoes. I mean, that's success. That's success.

GREG BENNICK: Well, Mark. Thank you very much. I appreciate it. And if people are interested in seeing more interviews and listening to and reading more interviews, I have a page on the Newman Numismatic Portal where those interviews are held and where they're stored. And if you have ideas, of course, you can be in touch anytime. I would always love to hear from you with ideas for more interviewees, of course. So, until the next time. Thank you very much everybody for watching, listening, reading, and I appreciate your time and we both do as well.

MARK AUERBACH: Can I just throw one thing out?

GREG BENNICK: Course, all the things you want.

MARK AUERBACH: I don't know if this is kosher or if it's part of these the scenario for this, but if anybody is interested in getting in touch with me, the Newman Numismatic Portal will have my contact information, and I'll be more than glad to answer any questions or expand upon anything I've said. If something captivated you or intrigued you, obviously there are more stories. I don't like to say anything ill of those that are deceased, because we don't have enough electric in New Jersey to cover that much time on camera.

It's like any other industry, except it's more personal, and people did share.

(phone rings)

I was blessed to come into an industry in 1973 and be taken under the wing of many people who were willing to share because I my interest was genuine. I wasn't just looking to make a check and, well, I'm

a coin collector. What can I do? I was well beyond 1950-D and 32-D and S quarters and 14-D pennies and 1909-s VDB's and 55 double dies, some of which I actually got in change, but that's another time.

The bottom line is, it's a hobby that can become a productive business, but an academic approach - knowledge, strong, deep, foundational knowledge - is imperative, and no pun intended, but from my old former employer, it is *paramount* to move forward in the industry. And there are companies that will hire you, but you've got to have some really good knowledge to get hired, to get in the door. You have to know a lot more than what it looks like, you know.

And if you're old enough to know what raw coins are, then you're really good. (laughter) Thank you all for listening. I hope this has been productive for the viewers and my last comment, it is the highest honor and privilege - thanks to Wayne and Greg - to be able to contribute to the Newman Numismatic Portal. He was a special friend and colleague, may he rest in peace, and his contributions to American numismatics…it's into the stratosphere, and I'm glad to be able to call him a friend and to share with him over the years, and give him viable and useful information. I hope this is just a smidgen of a give back in saying thank you to Eric for his kindnesses to me and the hobby.

GREG BENNICK: Thanks everybody.